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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SOCI](#) [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [UP](#)  
SUBJECT: UKRAINE: CRIMEA UPDATE - LESS TENSE THAN IN 2006;  
INTERETHNIC, RUSSIA, LAND FACTORS REMAIN CENTRAL

REF: A. 06 KYIV 4489  
[1](#)B. 06 KYIV 4558

Classified By: Ambassador, reason 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: During Ambassador's May 29-30 visit to Simferopol, Crimea and an earlier poloff visit May 17-18, all of our interlocutors agreed that the situation in Crimea appears less tense than it did six months ago (reftels). The primary issues in play remain control/ownership of land; the Russian factor in Crimean politics and society; interethnic relations between Crimean Tatars and Slavs; and a general lack of interest in and detachment from events going on in Kyiv and the rest of Ukraine. Both government and NGO interlocutors downplayed fears of extremism among traditionally moderate Muslim Crimean Tatars, who are no longer as politically unified behind the Mejlis as they once were. When asked about extremism in Crimea, about half of our contacts mentioned fringe Russian groups rather than Islamic radicalism. In general, it appears that the new Party of Regions leadership in Crimea, led by Speaker Grytsenko, has forged a good working relationship with Crimean Tatar leaders in the interests of social and economic stability in the peninsula, even if their comments in private reveal enduring anti-Tatar biases. This lower level of tension offers the USG more opportunities to engage with all Crimeans on issues of importance to the bilateral relationship. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Ambassador met May 29-30 with the Speaker of the Crimean parliament Anatoliy Grytsenko, generally acknowledged as the most important political figure in Crimea; the Chairman of Crimea's Council of Ministers (also known as Crimean PM) Viktor Plakida; and leading Crimean journalists and civil activists Liliya Budjurova, Shevket Memedov, Volodymyr Prytula, Lenur Yunusov, Yan Sinitsky, Alexander Pylypenko, and Andriy Shchykun. We had previously met the latter five journalists and activists plus Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Jemiliev May 17, as well as attended the May 18 commemoration of the 1944 deportation of Crimean Tatars and other nationalities into exile in Central Asia.

Crimea calmer in 2007 than 2006  
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[1](#)3. (SBU) All of our interlocutors agreed that after a tumultuous 2006, marked by the Feodosia SEA BREEZE controversy, interethnic conflict in Bakhchiserai and Sudak, and lower tourism levels due to sensationalist Russian media coverage of the SEA BREEZE standoff which drove many Russians to avoid Crimea for summer tourism, Crimea seemed much less tense in 2007. The confidence is reflected in higher booking rates for Crimea's short three-month summer high season this year than during a sub-par 2006.

[1](#)4. (C) National Security and Defense Council (NSDC)'s Oleksandr Lytyvnenko, who follows Crimea and helped draft

two 2006 Presidential decrees intended to stabilize Crimea, offered three reasons on the margins of the May 23 EUR DAS Kramer-NSDC Secretary Plyushch meeting: the clear consolidation of political power in Crimea in the hands of the Regions' team; the work of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) to dampen down the activities of the more radical pro-Russian elements stirring up trouble; and progress on resolving land issues. Like the journalists, however, Lytvynenko did not rule out a renewed flare up of tensions this summer, depending on what happens elsewhere in politics, both in Ukraine and in Russia.

15. (SBU) Journalist/civic activist Prytula detailed the individuals within Regions which had consolidated control over Crimea since the 2006 elections. PM Yanukovych and Regions' financier Akhmetov had delegated overall "control" of Crimea to Regions Verkhovna Rada MP and fellow Donetsk Anton Prykhodsky. Grytsenko was the de facto on-the-ground manager for Regions; he in turn had hand-picked Plakida. Crimean Rada MP (and former Crimean gangster from the 1990s) Oleksandr Melnyk pulled the political strings locally; economically, Regions' interests are pushed by Crimean Regions first deputy chair/Yalta city council secretary Oleksey Boyarchuk, the director of the Chernomorets Sanatorium owned by Prykhodsky and housing Yanukovych's Crimean dacha. (see para 17 for the interplay between politics and the group's business interests).

A place apart? Detachment from events in Kyiv  
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16. (SBU) Crimea is the country's least Ukrainian region, an autonomous republic in what is otherwise a centralized country. The Russian language dominates in Crimea, whose

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population is majority ethnic Russian thanks to Stalin's 1944 ethnic cleansing and re-population of the peninsula with people deemed loyal to Moscow. The journalists and civic activists asserted that there is only limited interest in political events in Kyiv among ordinary Crimean citizens, even if intellectuals follow developments. Budjurova and Memedov attributed this indifference to an ambivalent attitude towards Ukraine as an independent country as well as the overwhelming influence of Russian media sources that provide little and/or biased coverage of events in Ukraine. They lamented the lack of Ukrainian patriotism in Crimea. Sinitsky, Pylypenko, and Shchykun told us that Crimean Tatars remained Crimea's minority bulwark of progressive political thinking and pro-Ukrainian sentiment.

17. (SBU) That said, the 1994-95 flirtation with separatism remains in the past. Crimean Rada Speaker Grytsenko (Regions), widely seen as the most important political actor in Crimea, started his meeting with Ambassador by emphasizing that Crimea was an inseparable part of Ukraine. When asked about extremism in Crimea, Grytsenko cited marginal pro-Russian groups pushing autonomy, not worries about extremist Muslim groups finding traction among traditionally moderate Crimean Tatars. He regretted the lack of a working relationship with Yushchenko, whom he claimed had shown little interest in Crimean issues.

Interethnic relations - okay, but old biases remain  
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18. (SBU) One of Crimea's enduring politicized issues is interethnic relations, particularly between the 250,000 Crimean Tatar returnees from Central Asian exile and Crimea's Slavic population, 70 percent of whom arrived after the 1944 deportation or were born to the new arrivals, who took over the homes and fields of the deportees. Grytsenko delivered very positive, affirming comments in addressing the 15,000 Tatars who attended the annual May 18 commemoration of the deportation on Simferopol's central, calling the deportation "Crimea's tragedy" and thanking all Crimean Tatars who worked

constructively for a better Crimea.

¶9. (C) Grytsenko's private comments to Ambassador a week later struck a starkly different tone, however, revealing attitudes which complicate reconciliation efforts. He claimed interethnic tensions were the result of the Tatars' "betrayal" in 1945 (sic), and that a majority of Crimea's inhabitants viewed Tatars as traitors. He claimed research into identifying the fates of soldiers killed or missing during WWII revealed two instances of German military units having almost 25 percent Tatars serving as military police. He mentioned that unlawful land seizures had fueled resentment towards the Tatars and concluded that the Tatars brought many of their problems upon themselves. (note: the most recent squatter's movement is in fact multi-ethnic; while Crimean Tatars initiated it in March 2006, thousands of Slavic Crimeans frustrated by a decade-long wait for housing joined the movement).

¶10. (SBU) Budjurova, Crimea's leading journalist as editor-in-chief of "First Crimea," and Memedov, associated with Crimean Tatar Radio and TV projects, expressed pessimism that the interethnic situation would significantly improve as long as Regions maintained its current dominant support among 80-85 percent of Crimea's inhabitants and the legislative framework failed to address inequities for Tatars. Prytula worried that 2007 could still turn into another "hot summer" based on a planned pro-Russian convocation of a so-called Cossack festival in Feodosia to commemorate the 2006 anti-NATO demonstrations; the Crimean Cossack Union had already held an event in Bakhchisaray to inflame tensions with the Tatar community, he noted, trying to reignite the flames of 2006.

The Russia factor

¶11. (SBU) Both government and civil society interlocutors made clear that Russia figures much larger in Crimean dynamics than Ukrainian dynamics nationwide, thanks to media coverage, ethnic and linguistic factors, and heavy Russian investment in Crimea. Crimea's huge number of "Soviet" pensioners, particularly those who had retired from the military and security services, were another important factor.

¶12. (SBU) Politically, the more extreme pro-Russian forces represented by the Russian Bloc party (which contested the 2006 Crimean elections with Party of Regions in a joint "For Yanukovych" bloc) face somewhat of a dilemma, as Regions itself, now in power, favors stability and development rather

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than pro-Russian agitation and interethnic discord. Prytula predicted a split between the two forces may be brewing. Grytsenko himself professed opposition to the Russian Bloc, its 17 MPs elected under the list he headed, and its more provocative actions and statements (such as calling the Mejlis an organized crime ring). In the May 30 session with Ambassador, Prytula estimated the relative weight in the bloc between pragmatists interested in stability as opposed to pro-Russian radicals at 75/25, with the pragmatists taking direction from Donetsk and Kyiv and the radicals from Moscow; in the May 17 meeting, he had noted that Regions had given the Russian Bloc undue political prominence in 2006 by forming a single Crimean electoral list, providing them with slots in the Crimean Rada they would not have won on their own. Shchykin and Pylypenko questioned how much of a difference there was between the two wings, since the Regions' pragmatists seemed eager to cut investment deals with Russian money that undercut Ukrainian interests in Crimea.

¶13. (SBU) Prytula and Shchykin maintained that despite the relative calm of 2007, Russia still viewed Crimea as a proving ground for political tactics for sowing ethnic discord that could move quickly from "soft" to "hard," with

the Russian Bloc and its affiliated Crimean Cossack Union playing a key role. However, over the past year, Moscow had diversified its support of pro-Russian actors, many of whom squabbled between each other. The Sevastopol-Crimea-Russian Front, a fringe organization still advocating separatism/reunion with Russia, now had its offices in the building of the official Russian Cultural Center, for instance.

¶14. (SBU) After two years of watching central power wane and respond ineffectively to the crises of 2006, the journalists saw recent evidence of more effective SBU action. The radical youth groups Proryv (Breakthrough) and the Eurasian Youth Union (EYU) had dramatically lower profiles in 2007; the SBU had gone to court to deregister the particularly troublesome Bakhchiseraï EYU branch. Thanks to an SBU "black list," Eurasian movement leader and ideologue Aleksandr Dugin was refused entry at the Simferopol, Crimea airport June 6. Fellow Russian meddler in Crimean affairs, Duma MP Konstantin Zatulin, was also denied entry to Ukraine April 16 based on SBU concerns over his participation in the 2006 SEA BREEZE protests, SBU Acting Chief Nalyvaichenko told the press that day. Proryv was suffering its own schisms between the Tiraspol and Moscow, Crimea, and Abkhazia branches, with mutual accusations of being tools of various intel services, noted Prytula.

#### Developing Crimea: The Land Game

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¶15. (SBU) The major socio-economic factor in play in Crimea is ownership/control of land, and how best to develop Crimea in terms of attracting investment and creating jobs. One of the major Crimean stories of 2006 had been the squatter's movement, born out of frustration of bureaucratic delays and corruption which allowed the rich and connected to acquire land while common Crimeans waited in vain for over a decade (ref B). Most interlocutors, including Mejlis leader Jemilev and Crimean PM Plakida, complimented Grytsenko for his constructive role in trying to resolve the squatter's dilemma by pushing for tracts of land currently occupied by squatters to be legalized, first in Alushta, with an 800 hectare area around Simferopol also in the works. Plakida also noted Jemilev had spoken out against land seizures in his May 18 deportation commemoration address. Grytsenko nevertheless complained privately that the Tatars had needlessly complicated the squatter issue with their actions, and downplayed the significant non-Tatar element among squatters.

¶16. (SBU) Both Plakida and Grytsenko formally stressed the need to invest in infrastructure--the Simferopol airport, the major Kyiv-Simferopol highway, south coast facilities--that would be critical to continued development of tourism, Crimea's primary economic lifeline. But the real action continues to be allocation of land controlled by the state.

¶17. (U) The Crimean Cabinet under Plakida quietly allocated 113 hectares of land, worth an estimated \$250 million, to the Antal-Krym company to build a golf course and a condominium in the Crimean forest reserve near Yalta, for a mere 20 cents per hectare per year for 49 years, reported Chornomorets TV May 19; inhabitants of a village in the plot will be forcibly relocated. Antal-Krym's owner? None other than Regions MP Pryhodsky. The Crimean prosecutor at the time (and now Deputy General Prosecutor of Ukraine) Viktor Shemchuk stated May 19 that the Crimean cabinet had no right to allocate the

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plot, since only the Ukrainian cabinet could allocate nature reserve lands. Shemchuk estimated that 29,000 trees would be cut to build the golf course.

Crimean Tatar integration = political fracturing?

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¶18. (SBU) Crimean Tatars are currently conducting their own

informal communal elections to its national assembly (the kurultay), which will then pick the 33 member executive (mejlis) to serve for five years. While the Mejlis and its long-time leader Jemilev have long spoken for and commanded the loyalty of the vast majority of Tatars, that tight political identity started to break down recently, as Tatars find increasing success in integrating into life in Crimea and develop their own political preferences. Some of the journalists and civic activists expressed some concern about the political fracturing, since a unified Crimean Tatar community had proven the strongest bulwark in Crimea in support of democratic values and the Ukrainian state. Indeed, for at least one day a year, May 18, a day of commemoration of the "national tragedy" of the mass deportation of Crimean Tatars and other ethnic minorities in 1944, Crimea's capital Simferopol seems truly Ukrainian, awash in the blue and yellow of both Crimean Tatar flags and Ukrainian flags, with the Russian tricolor and communist red flags frequently used in street protests out of sight and mind.

¶19. (SBU) Since Ukrainian independence, the Mejlis has affiliated itself with Rukh and therefore with Our Ukraine. However, in the 2006 parliamentary elections, Tymoshenko's bloc BYuT made significant inroads among Tatar voters and other "pro Ukrainian" Crimeans, matching the Mejlis/Rukh vote. A new Tatar political project called Milly Firka, started by Soviet-era Tatar intellectuals who accommodated Soviet authorities while in exile in Uzbekistan rather than taking Jemilev's dissident route, has made a media splash with a more pro-Russian, pan Tatar approach, even as it seeks a political sponsor. Journalists Prytula and Yunusov speculated BYuT, Regions' Akhmetov (a Volga/Kazan Tatar), Tatarstan, and Moscow were possibilities. More significant is the grass-roots threat to Mejlis authority posed by the squatter movement and its Danyal Ametov, who organized the biggest non-Mejlis organized convocation of Tatars ever in January when 5000 gathered to protest the lack of action on land rights. Subsequent gatherings were much smaller after Jemilev/Mejlis made pleas against the actions to avoid provocations, with only 500 rallying behind Ametov.

¶20. (SBU) Jemilev and his deputy, fellow OU MP Rifat Chubarov, face a dilemma if Rukh chooses to run in a nationalist "Pravytsya" (Rightist) bloc separate from OU. Jemilev told us May 17 that if Pravytsya and OU did not reach agreement on a joint list, he and Chubarov would run with OU to ensure Crimean Tatar inclusion in the next Rada.

¶21. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:  
[www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev](http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev).  
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